



# FASWORLDWIDE

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## Programs and Opportunities

### Partners for Half a Century: Soy Week in Japan

*By Bob Callanan*

In the fast-paced, disposable society in which we live, not many things last half a century. So when U.S. soybean producers talk about celebrating 50 years of partnership activities with Japan, it really does have special meaning.

This story presents the highlights of Soy Week, a jam-packed series of meetings, activities, and a celebration in Tokyo, Japan, in August 2006. The week marked a very special occasion in the history of the U.S. soybean industry. The story began when the volunteer farmer leaders and support staff of ASA (the American Soybean Association) and USB (the United Soybean Board) — ambassadors of agriculture — traveled more than 6,000 miles through 10 time zones for Soy Week.



Nisshin Oilseed Group chairman Jokei Akitani receives a commemorative plaque from ASA president Rick Ostlie.

*Photos by Bob Callanan, ASA communications director*

#### Getting Down to Business

The group wasted no time in getting down to business. Some members accompanied Paul Burke, director of trade relations for USSEC (the U.S. Soybean Export Council), to ASA-IM's (ASA International Marketing) Japan office to meet with U.S. food soybean and soy product suppliers. The rest went to the 10th Annual Partnership Forum with officers and members of JOPA (the Japanese Oilseed Processors Association) and the Japan Oil & Fat Importers & Exporters Association. Over the years, this forum has provided U.S. soybean farmer leaders with direct knowledge of Japanese customer needs and concerns, and given Japanese soy buyers the opportunity to observe U.S. soybean production, harvesting, and transportation.

JOPA managing director Yoshinori Komura described the relationship



Left to right: USB chairman Curt Raasch, Showa Sangyo president Shigeo Fukui, and ASA president Rick Ostlie discuss soy oil products.

between ASA and Japan's oilseed industry as a "marriage." He called the early years the "honeymoon period," when U.S. and Japanese soybean interests worked hand-in-hand to solve issues, develop new products, and build market demand. The relationship has now matured into a mutual dependence that benefits both partners, Komura said, providing Japan with the soybeans and technical assistance it needs, and U.S. soybean growers with a dependable export market.

#### Partnership Meetings Get Underway

The group also met with many Japanese customers for U.S. soybeans to exchange views and information on various topics. Some customers expressed concerns about the impact of U.S. biodiesel production on export supplies, and the use of agricultural chemicals. "We assured our Japanese customers that demand for biodiesel will not significantly impact our ability to supply them with the soybeans they need," said ASA president and North Dakota producer Rick Ostlie. "Although we anticipate biodiesel utilization increasing from about 3.3 percent of this year's soybean crop to 10 to 13 percent of our 2015 crop, we also anticipate in the next 10 years our yields will increase, and more acres will be planted."

"We also told our customers that as farmers, we are very conscientious about chemical handling and application," Ostlie said. "I explained how I have to re-certify every three years to handle agricultural chemicals." He also talked about ASA's work with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to get multiple fungicides approved for use on the U.S. crop in advance of Asian soybean rust disease. Growers in some Southern states used fungicides in 2005 and 2006 to reduce soybean rust. ASA-IM has also given Japanese regulators information on residue levels for

chemicals registered for use on U.S. soybeans to show that U.S. levels fall within Japanese guidelines.

The group attended a briefing by Daniel Berman, minister-counselor, and Deanna Ayala, attaché, both of USDA's Office of Agricultural Affairs in Tokyo, part of FAS (the Foreign Agricultural Service). "The 50th anniversary of ASA's office in Japan says two things," Berman said. "Soybeans are important, and Japan is important. We need to hold on to this market at all cost, as it's virtually irreplaceable."

Berman explained that because the Japanese population is not growing, Japan needs smart marketing and problem solvers. He urged the U.S. growers to help Japanese crushers maintain a firm business footing in traditional uses, and also develop new markets. "Food use of soybeans in Japan is 1,000 years old, but Japan is interested in U.S. research on health benefits," Berman said. "Take satisfaction that the United States supplies such safe and nutritious products."

Referring to the link between U.S. growers and the Japanese soy industry, Berman said, "Japanese buyers can afford solutions and need the best value. They need to have frequent contacts and a year-in, year-out, office presence from ASA. Japan is a customer that cannot be taken for granted — that would be a huge mistake."

Jokei Akitani, chairman of Nisshin OilliO Group, said the relationship between U.S. soybean farmers and Japanese customers has helped to bring the two countries closer together. "A large amount of



ASA president Rick Ostlie and USB director John Wray give a presentation on farm chemical use and Asian soybean rust at the ASA-IM Food Bean Conference.



Left to right: USSEC CEO Dan Duran, USB executive director Yvonne Dock, USB chairman Curt Raasch, ASA president Rick Ostlie, ASA CEO Stephen Censky, and ASA-IM Japan country director Tom Nishio hold a news conference.





Japanese musicians play contemporary music on traditional instruments at the 50th anniversary celebration.

### e-Sources

For more information on the groups in this story, visit the following websites:

ASA (the American Soybean Association):  
<http://www.SoyGrowers.com>

ASA-IM Japan (the American Soybean Association International Marketing office in Japan):  
<http://www.asajapan.org>

USSEC (the United States Soybean Export Council):  
<http://www.asasoya.org>

USB (the United Soybean Board):  
<http://www.unitedsoybean.org>

For an interview of Toshihito Hirasawa, Marubeni Corporation's general manager for oilseeds, fats, and oils, by ASA communications director Bob Callanan, go to:  
<http://www.SoyGrowers.com/newsroom/srn.htm>

The interview was carried by ASA's Soy Radio Newslane, a service provided to U.S. farm broadcasters.

the food needed by the Japanese people must be imported, and since about 75 percent of the soybeans consumed in Japan comes from the United States, a stable supply is critical," he said. "We must have communication to maintain this relationship between our countries, and ASA has been serving a very important role as an intermediary."

### Food Bean Conference and Trade Show

The group attended the Ninth Annual ASA-IM Food Bean Conference, to which Tom Nishio, ASA's Japan country director, and Dan Duran, USSEC CEO (chief executive officer), welcomed 200 participants. USB chair and Iowa producer Curt Raasch reported on the identity preserved, food grade soybean crop. USB director and Kansas producer John Wray, along with Ostlie, gave a presentation on U.S. farm chemical usage and Asian soybean rust. The trade show following the conference featured products from 12 U.S. companies and three state associations that ranged from specialty soybean varieties to packaged soy foods.

### Anniversary Day Arrives

To begin Anniversary Day, U.S. soybean industry officials held a news conference for 20 media representatives. Yvonne Dock, USB executive director, expressed growers' appreciation for Japan's purchases of U.S. soybean products. Stephen Censky, ASA CEO and former FAS official, emphasized the U.S. commitment to servicing the technical needs of customers in Japan.

"The celebration of ASA's market development office in Japan really illustrates the importance of long-term relationships and trade servicing of important buyers," Censky said. "Japanese buyers and their trade associations truly value the information they have received from ASA, and the trust that has been built over the past 50 years.



About 400 people attend the reception to mark the historic 50th anniversary of the opening of ASA's office in Tokyo in 1956.

Yet they also want to be reassured today that we still are paying attention to their needs."

#### **Final Thoughts**

"This two-way partnership has been invaluable to U.S. soybean farmers to understand the requirements of our Japanese customers," Rick Ostlie said. "We welcome the opportunity to host Japanese industry representatives at our farms and businesses." Looking ahead, Tom Nishio said, "Now that this milestone has been established, we have to move forward to new challenges for the success of the next 50 years for the U.S. soy growers."

Stephen Censky summed up Soy Week in Japan by saying, "All activities — whether it was the 10th Annual Partnership Forum with Japanese processors and importers, the Ninth Annual Food Bean Conference with food bean buyers and manufacturers, the 50th

anniversary celebration, or the one-on-one meetings with key buyers — all served to underscore American soybean farmers' strong dedication to meeting the needs of Japanese buyers. We hope and anticipate that this kind of trade servicing continues to result in U.S. soybeans maintaining over 75-percent market share in the Japanese market. That's something ASA-IM, and all soybean farmers, can feel proud about."

*Bob Callanan is the communications director of the American Soybean Association.*

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